

"Outguessing"

The BATTER

By
CHRISTY MATHEWSON

EDITORIAL NOTE.—*Christy Mathewson has been pitching for the New York baseball club of the National League for ten years. During that time the New York Club has sometimes been first and sometimes last. It has been a tail-ender and a world's champion. That is to say, in some years it has been the weakest team as a team and in other years it has been the strongest. Whether the team has been weak or strong has made little difference to Mathewson. During that ten years he has won 262 games and lost 118 games, a winning percentage in ten years of .689. This record does not include the many games in which Mathewson has pulled the team out of a hole—gone to the rescue of some other pitcher. His record as given here includes only the full games in which he has worked. No other pitcher has ever had such a record. Lots of other pitchers have as much speed as Mathewson; lots of others have as wide curves. But no other seem to have something which he possesses in the same degree. That something is "head." "Matty" has a great "head." He outguesses the batter. In the following story he explains as well as anyone can explain the process by which he fools the batter and baserunner.*

"IN pitching and winning your games," I have often been asked by devotees of the American game, "how much figure does brainwork cut?"

Many an honest young fanatic has asked me that question during the ten years and more that I have been pitching major league baseball, peering at my head meanwhile, as though he expected some such reply as "no headwork whatever." Many an older and wiser baseball follower, fortified by the wondrous knowledge that comes to men after years of squatting in the grand-stand, has asked me the same thing in a modified form.

How much figure does brainwork cut? I don't quite know myself. I do know that

no pitcher, however powerful or agile, can hope to become a great performer without being thoroughly equipped "from the shoulders up." The steel arm is desirable, the good eye is even more desirable, but, without the little filling of gray matter that is popularly supposed to inhabit the skull, a pitcher might just as well pack his suit-case and go back to the quaint little village where he was first discovered. It isn't the iron in the arm, because lots of longshoremen could snap a pitcher's arm in two with a single twist; it's the combination of brain and body, the perfect coöperation of mind and muscle, that makes a man a successful major league twirler.

Most pitchers who break into fast com-

pany and stay there by consistently demonstrating their ability, are men that went through a long course of sprouts before they got anywhere. They, like hundreds of successful men in other walks of life, were forced to look, listen and learn before they had anything like an even chance to win their spurs. They had to stand for the taunts of the hardened veterans, men brought up in a school that was indeed rough, not so many years ago; they had to stand the humiliation of being “yanked” from the box by some over eager and not over brainy young manager; they had to learn, in short, the lesson that we all have to learn in this life—the lesson of labor. That is why, it seems to me, that successful pitchers always take into consideration the mental side of baseball and the bearing that headwork has on the outcome of a game.

Many things have been said and written about pitchers outguessing batters, and batters outguessing pitchers, and to tell the truth there has always been a question in my mind about the outguessing proposition. I have seen so many instances where guesses went wrong—so many hundreds of instances—that I am about the last human being in the world to pose as an oracle on the subject of pitching psychology. Nevertheless, there certainly is a lot of psychology about pitching a baseball, and I think that my readers will agree with me, if they are good enough to read this article from the first to the ninth inning.

Joe Tinker, the clever little shortstop of the Chicago club, is a man with whom I have fought many a battle of wits, and I am glad to acknowledge that he has come out of the fuss with flying colors on many occasions. There was a time when Tinker was putty in my hands. For two years he was the least dangerous man on the Chicago team. His weakness was a low curve on the outside, and I fed him low curves on the outside so often that I had him looking like an invalid every time he came to the plate. Then Joseph went home one night and did a little deep thinking. He got a nice long bat, and took his stand at least a foot farther from the plate, after that night of meditation, and then he had me. If I kept the ball on the inside edge of the plate, he was in a splendid position to meet it, and if I tried to keep my offerings outside, he had plenty of time to “step into ‘em.” From that day on, Tinker became one of the most dangerous batters I ever faced, not because his natural hitting ability had

increased, but because he didn’t propose to let the pitcher do all of the “outguessing.”

Granting that a pitcher needs something more than a clear head, it must be admitted that the successful pitcher is always a student. There are a hundred and one little things that every good twirler has in his repertoire, a hundred and one little things that the average baseball lover doesn’t know anything about. I have always made it a practice, before going into a crucial series, to get some kind of authentic information about the strength or weakness of every batter slated to face me, and once I know positively that a batter doesn’t like speed, I feed him oceans of it. If I find that his weakness is a low curve, he gets that for a steady diet. Willie Keeler, one of the most scientific batsmen that ever lived, once told a newspaper man that the secret of his success as a hitter was to “hit ‘em where they ain’t,” and I think the secret of a pitcher’s success is to “give ‘em what they don’t want.” If a pitcher can do that, the batter will have his troubles in “hitting ‘em where they ain’t.”

When we met the Athletics in the season of 1905, after having won the National league championship, I realized that a good part of the pitching burden would be on my shoulders, and I began making inquiries about the weak and strong points of the American league champions. There isn’t much chance, naturally, for a man playing steadily in one league to attend games in another organization, so a pitcher or a manager seeking to find the weak links in the armor of an opposing team must depend largely on the advice and information given him by baseball men and intelligent “fans” who have had the opportunity to see the opposing team in action. The well-meant advice of friendly novices must be ignored, plentiful though it may be, but the tips given by regular baseball men are invaluable.

Monte Cross, who played on Connie Mack’s infield in 1905, was known by me to be a dangerous hitter, though his average was not high. He was the kind of a hitter who was always bobbing up with a hit at a time when a hit meant trouble, and just before the series started, I did a little quiet detective work through friends of mine who knew the game and knew Monte. I had been told that Monte’s weakness was a high, fast ball, but when I talked to “Kid” Gleason, of the Philadelphia Nationals, Gleason told me that Cross had fought

against and overcome his weakness, and had developed into a murderer of the high, fast delivery. Keeping Gleason's advice in mind, I gave Cross nothing but low curves during the series, and had him helpless from the start. Had it not been for Gleason's tip, Monte's always dangerous bat might have caused trouble in that series, for there were some very close games before it was all over.

In the summer of 1901, Jesse Burkett, one of the best natural hitters that ever lived, and the man who led the National League that same season, faced me for the first time. I was young and inexperienced, and at that time depended almost entirely on my drop curve. One of these I served to Mr. Burkett, and he slammed it so hard that the impact almost broke the right field fence. While the incident didn't make me any too cheerful, it did Burkett a world of good, and he got a lot of pleasure out of "kidding" me regarding my drop curve. That was the last low curve that I pitched Burkett that season, and he never got another hit off of my delivery. I kept them going at him fast and high, and I am sure to this day that the old veteran was thinking all the time about the low curve that he sent to the right field fence. He was waiting for another, and he never got it.

The greatest strength of a pitcher, aside from his control, is what the players call his "mixture." That means no more nor less than what the word implies—his variety of fast and slow balls, his serving of this or that curve. What we call the "change of pace," the delivering of a fast and then a slow ball with the same preliminary motions, and the mixing of a high fast ball and a slow curve, are the successful pitcher's best assets, but it must be remembered that all the time the bombardment is going on the pitcher is in a duel of wits with the man up there at the plate, and that there is as much mixture of brain flashes as there is of delivery. It isn't the easiest thing in the world to explain to the layman, but it amounts to about this: A pitcher can throw the same ball three times in a row to a nimble-witted batsman and still be "mixing 'em up," paradoxical as it may seem. To illustrate, Cy Seymour, when he was with Cincinnati, struck out three times in one game I pitched in 1905. Cy was a mighty batsman in those days, one of the best ever, and only the other day he told me that he would never forget striking out three times in one game. I fooled him by constantly

giving him the same slow curve, knowing that he, being a shrewd and seasoned batsman, would be expecting a fast ball for a change. The change never came. Had I literally "mixed 'em," Cy would have been in line for a mighty hit, perhaps, but while he was at the plate trying to outguess me, I was fortunate enough to outguess him as above indicated.

Before dismissing the subject of guessing and outguessing, I must record an incident where I was outguessed by the catcher on my own team. It happened in Taunton, 1899, and I can't forget either the name of the town or the date. I was pitching for the Taunton club against the Brockton club, and the latter organization had a first baseman as big as Dan Brouthers, and, from all reports, as formidable a hitter. I was afraid of him when I saw him come up to the bat. His name was Cy Perkins and he wanted everybody to know it. He looked like three Hans Wagners.

The catcher on our club wasn't very keen for colleges or their output, and he thought about as much of me as the king of the Danes thinks of Dr. Cook. An old timer himself, he hated to see a boy breaking into the game without brass knuckles or a jimmy. He hadn't been used to seeing college boys playing professional ball, and he was forever praying that the time would never come. Being "agin me," therefore, he was quick to notice my timidity when Cy Perkins lumbered up to the plate with his mighty club, and he made the most of it. Stepping out toward the pitcher's box, he whispered to me that Perkins had only one weakness, a low ball on the inside. There were two men on the bases at the time, enough to win the game for our opponents eventually, and I gave Mr. Perkins a low ball on the inside. I guess it is going yet, but I am sure that it went almost as long as I went to college. Mr. Perkins liked low balls on the inside, after all. Knowing that I had made two souls happy by doing what one of the souls wilfully urged me to do, I swallowed my chagrin and said nothing. Many and many a college boy has broken into the game since then, and to-day they are welcomed with open arms if they have the "goods," but it was pretty tough sledding for us in the days of one decade ago.

Lovers of baseball have often asked me how I deal with a batsman whom I have never faced and about whose batting ability I know nothing. Every seasoned pitcher

has been called on often enough to meet batters he never saw before, and in such pinches he must rely largely on luck, though there is a way to get some line on new opponents. When I am facing a new batsman for the first time, I pay particular attention to two things—the position he assumes at the plate and the way he holds his bat. If, for instance, he holds his bat well up toward the middle, as Keeler always held his, there isn't much use of sending him speed. Batters of that type are always ready for speed and they can meet the fastest ball a man ever threw. A low curve on the inside will do for a starter, and if such a batter goes after it and fails to connect, you have his "number." Even if he does hit it he can't send it far. The batter who stands well back from the plate with a long bat and a grip near the end is the batter who can send a low curve into the southeast quarter of the adjoining section.

While a batter may work hard and overcome a certain weakness, that does not necessarily mean that he becomes a great hitter. In centering his energies on overcoming his weakness for a high ball he may lose his strength on low balls because he has been continually fed high ones by opposing pitchers. In that case I would try him on a low ball and if it was found that he could still hit that the only thing left would be a curve ball or change of pace. It is often the case that a pitcher cannot deceive a batter's eyesight but he can deceive him mentally. For instance, most any batter can hit a slow ball if he knows it is coming. The same is true in regard to a fast ball, but if he is expecting a fast ball and gets a slow one a strike out or a weak grounder to the infield will be his best effort.

Some batters, a few of the chosen, have no weakness that the most studious pitcher can detect. Men like Hans Wagner and Lajoie don't care much what the opposing pitcher has to offer. They are in the same class to-day, that Anson and Brouthers were gracing years ago. Big, rangy fellows, they wield large, long bats as easily as they wield a toothpick after the game is over. They stand well back from the plate, as a rule, and if you put the ball on the inside they are ready for it. If you keep it on the outside, they simply reach out and cuff it. I have pitched against Hans Wagner for many years, and though I have been fortunate enough to fool him many times I always charge those occasions to good luck. I

know that he can hit anything I can pitch to him, or anything that anybody can pitch to him, and hit it into the middle of next week. There is no such thing as outguessing a batter of the Wagner type, and I am glad there aren't many of them.

I have often been told by my good friends that a pitcher is about ninety per cent. of the game, and have never failed to assure them that nothing could be further from the truth. A winning pitcher helps a baseball team a whole lot, of course, but there are eight other boys on that team, and nobody knows it better than the winning pitcher. The recent series between the Giants and Yankees will prove my point.

In that series I got away with every game in which I participated, but I won because I received magnificent support, both in the field and at the bat. Had George Wiltse been right, or had McGraw sent in Ames or Crandall, the story would have been the same if the support had been of the same splendid caliber. The wonderful work of Devlin, Devore and Doyle—the wonderful work of the whole team, for the matter of that, made defeat practically impossible. With that great machine working behind me, and with the greatest manager of them all backing me up, I simply couldn't lose. That's how much a pitcher is ninety per cent. of the game.

As a matter of fact, it would be impossible to establish the mathematical relation of the pitcher to a ball club. Figures in baseball are often misleading. One pitcher may work brilliantly for thirteen innings and have a 1 to 0 defeat marked up against his record, while on the following day another pitcher may luckily win a 10 to 8 game. It is a matter of record that in the season of 1909, Leon Ames, of the Giants, in finishing a seventeen inning game and participating in two extra inning ties, pitched thirty consecutive innings without allowing a run and yet did not win one of the games.

From this it can be seen that the winning power of a team must depend largely upon its run-getting ability. To reach an estimate of value we will say that offensive play is half the game. I think that conservative. That would leave but fifty per cent. and the pitcher could not be all of that. I would say that about thirty per cent. of the strength of a ball club lies in the pitcher's box. No matter how effective a pitcher may be in the box he cannot win unless the team bats in runs behind him. It is true, however, that the work of a

pitcher can have a very strong influence upon the work of the rest of the team. Disgruntled fans frequently make the assertion that the infielders and outfielders will not support certain pitchers. That idea is erroneous. Ball players always want to win, no matter who is in the box. It is usually lack of control on the part of the pitcher that disconcerts or demoralizes the infield. Players lose confidence because they are uncertain as to what will happen next. The catcher may call for a "pitch-out"—that is, a ball thrown wide of the batter, so that the catcher can have a clear throw to second to catch a runner who is about to steal. The infielders all see this signal and both the shortstop and second baseman leave their positions to assist in making the play. If the pitcher does not pitch-out, as expected, the batter may hit the ball through the spot left vacant and upset the whole team. Once they lose confidence in a pitcher in a game, it is very difficult to regain it. It is not that they will not support the pitcher. On the contrary, it is the fault of the pitcher who will not give them a chance. If the pitcher has control everything works smoothly.

If it were true that pitching is ninety per cent. of the strength of a ball club it would be logical to assume that the team having the best staff of pitchers would always win the pennant. That is not true. The baseball reader who pays attention to records will notice that the teams which win the pennants always have several players who lead in their respective departments. And this does not necessarily include the pitchers. For instance, the Baltimore club, back in the early nineties, won three successive pennants with pitchers whose names can scarcely be remembered.

The hackneyed cry of "What we need is pitchers" could well be changed to, "What we need is hitters, base runners and fielders." Without them there can be no pennants.

Some of the best pitchers ever connected with professional baseball have received bumps from sources so humble that any false esteem they may have held for themselves has vanished like the snows of last season. Cy Young, the noblest old Roman of them all, has been beaten by village teams. The best pitchers of the World's Champions, not long after they had trimmed the Cubs, were beaten by the unknown Cuban teams they faced during their late barn-storming trip. They pitched

good ball, the kind of ball that would defeat any team if it came to a matter of a whole season's record, but luck, the one thing above all others that makes baseball the thrilling and perfect game it is, decreed otherwise. There are times, you see, when all the science and all the outguessing in the world will not avail.

I shall never forget a trimming I got from a village team in Michigan. Just after we had defeated the Athletics for the world's championship in 1905, Frank Bowerman and I went on a hunting trip. As soon as the natives of Frank's home town, Romeo, Michigan, knew that I was his guest, they came and begged us to do the battery work for the Romeo club in a game they were to play with the club representing the adjoining town. We agreed, and I am afraid that our willingness cost a lot of honest Romeo villagers everything except their family plate. The thought of defeat never entered their minds, any more than it entered ours, but that little rival town's club came over to Romeo and gave Messrs. Bowerman and Mathewson, fresh from their big league triumphs, a touch of high life that they never forgot. They beat us 5 to 0, and I guess they are celebrating it to this day. I don't know just how they managed it, because I was in perfect trim at that time. I had everything, as we say in professional circles, and they hit everything I had. I didn't mind it much myself, but I felt sorry for poor Bowerman. He had to keep on living there, and I didn't.

The real test of a pitcher's ability arrives when the opposing team gets men on bases. His responsibility is increased while his freedom of pitching motion is restricted. He must watch the base runner constantly and at the same time must deliver the ball to the batter with the least possible swing of the arm. In other words he can't "wind up." Some pitchers find it difficult to get as much speed, curve or accuracy with the short arm motion as they do with their usual swing. This affects some pitchers mentally, as the curtailment of physical effort prevents them from concentrating their mind on the man at the bat. At the same time the base runners, and frequently the coaches, are constantly trying to annoy them. To protect himself the pitcher must try and detect some action on the part of the base runner which will indicate when he is going to attempt to steal the next base. In this he is materially assisted by the catcher. Once the pitcher or the catcher



"MATTY'S" THREE
POSITIONS OF DELIVERY.
FROM PHOTOGRAPHS
MADE BY
C. F. TANKERSLEY,
AT MARLIN, TEXAS,
IN MARCH



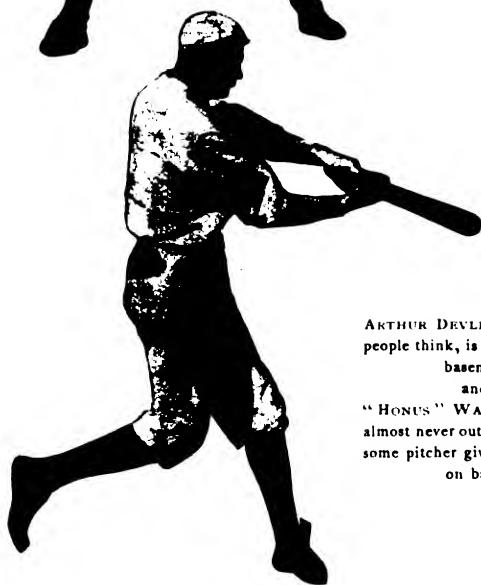
discovers when the runner is going to start the remedy is simple. Frequent throws to the base will prevent the runner from getting too much of a lead, and when he does start, the ball is pitched out of reach of the batter so that the catcher can have a clear throw to second.

While the pitcher is watching the base runner he knows that the base runner is also watching him, in an effort to ascertain whether the ball is to be delivered to the plate or to the base. Therefore, no preliminary movement on the part of the pitcher must betray his intentions.

George Van Haltren, the famous base runner of his day, once told me that he could tell to a certainty when certain pitchers were going to deliver the ball to the batter. This enabled him to get a running start and many times the poor catcher was blamed for allowing a stolen base, when in fact the pitcher was unconsciously at fault. John McGraw, manager of the Giants, spends several weeks each season in teaching his young pitchers to overcome that kind of a weakness. For instance, he once discovered that several of the star base runners were stealing on Louis Drucke



SAM CRAWFORD, of Detroit,
and
FRED CLARK, of Pittsburgh,
two men who are mighty hard
to outguess



ARTHUR DEVLIN, who, many
people think, is the best third
baseman,
and

"HONUS" WAGNER, who is
almost never outguessed unless
some pitcher gives him a base
on balls



Photographs by Paul Thompson, N. Y.

because he had a peculiar lift to his heel just before he delivered the ball to the plate. It took some time to cure him of the habit, but he finally overcame it.

On the other hand, certain base runners also give advance notice of their intentions. Men like Bescher, of Cincinnati; Chance, of Chicago, and Murray, of New York, never give the pitcher any inkling as to when they are to start. They take the same lead off the base and cavort up and down the base line in the same manner, whether they are going to steal or wait. But there are others who disclose their

thieving intentions through their anxiety to get a long lead. Such men are often caught napping at first.

The tremendous popularity of the national game—its popularity is growing every year—means that in the years to come there will be hundreds of baseball stars where there are dozens now. Every healthy boy has it in him to become a good ball player, though he may never care to follow the pastime professionally. Being a professional player myself, I may be overfond of the game to which I owe so much, but I can think of many other callings and



SHERWOOD MAGEE, of Philadelphia, who was the best batter in the National League last year,
and
JOE TINKER, who seldom lets "MATTY" outguess him

FRANK CHANCE, who has sometimes made MATHEWSON feel badly,
and
another pose of MATHEWSON, who has more often given CHANCE the "dumps"

Photographs by Paul Thompson, N. Y.

many other pastimes that a boy might better shun. Baseball is always played out in the sunshine, where the air is pure and the grass is green, and there is something

about the game, or at least I have always found it so, which teaches one how to win or lose as a gentleman should, and that is a very fine thing to learn.

[That's the way Mathewson handles batters. As he says, there are some batters who don't allow the pitcher to do all the outguessing. Eddie Collins of the World's Champion Athletics is one of that kind. He is a slight chap, not very powerful, but he hit the ball safe every third time he came to bat last year, and he stole eighty-one bases. That is a great many more than anybody else in any league stole. So Collins uses his head, too. He hits safe because he outguesses the pitcher, steals bases because he outguesses the pitcher—and the catcher. How he does it he will tell in a story "Outguessing the Pitcher" in the June issue of this Magazine.]